

Monitors help improve quality of area streams

By Elizabeth Goers • For The Reporter • October 16, 2008

Concerned residents of the Fond du Lac area have been keeping watch over local waterways for the past three years.

Members of citizen stream monitoring groups work in partnership with UW-Extension, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the River Alliance of Wisconsin. They track water temperature, clarity, dissolved oxygen levels and insect life of local streams leading to restoration of waterways in Fond du Lac. Monitors check these variables at least once a month starting in May and ending in September.

With systematic data collection, choosing a stream to restore is no longer arbitrary based on how a stream looks or its location, said Robert Hasse, past president of Central Wisconsin Trout Unlimited (CWTU) based in Oshkosh. Decisions can be made based on information about what streams most need attention and restoration.

"We now have a reason and a rationale for picking which stream to restore," Hasse said. "The most viable for our restoration purposes is temperature. If we have too high of a temperature in a stream, it won't support a trout population."

CWTU is in the process of removing two fallen willow trees from an area of Campground Creek, which flows through the towns of Byron and Oakfield and into the East Branch of the Fond du Lac River. Fallen trees cause a fluctuation in temperature that can provide an infertile breeding environment. Once the timber is removed, stream flow will increase, evening out the temperature and bottom of the streambed and creating more ideal conditions for trout to spawn.

Impaired Waters list

Gerry Smet monitors the troubled Parsons Creek in Hobbs Woods in the town of Byron. The creek has been placed on the statewide Impaired Waters list. Smet says monitors held meetings with farmers and residents with land on Parsons Creek to discuss how things can be improved and what ideas they may have to help.

"The public needs to know that streams are a part of life and life doesn't work without water," Smet said. "Everyone thinks of fish right away, but not only the fish are affected. Birds and other animals use the stream."

Smet said the plan is for CWTU to widen Parsons Creek, get local residents involved and make the project public.

Hasse says the group wants to take on Parsons Creek as its big project for next year and move it off the Impaired Waterways list.

Both Parsons Creek and Camp Ground Creek flow into the East Branch of the Fond du Lac River where Laura DeGolier monitors. With all the work by Trout Unlimited in the feeder streams and her group's monitoring efforts, DeGolier hopes she will eventually see the East Branch of the Fond du Lac River return to a high-quality fishing river with fish safe for everyone to eat.

"Nature and the waterways are an integral part of daily life," DeGolier said. "We are all part of the water community. I believe the monitoring we do makes a difference in the long term — plus it's a wonderful excuse for me to learn and stand in the river."

Getting started

All three volunteers attended the first public meeting concerning Parsons Creek on Aug. 25. The meeting informed farmers and residents on the stream of the sediment buildup. Hasse recalled the experience was educational for many residents who thought sediment problems disappeared after a large storm or flood, not knowing that the sediment eventually flows into the East Branch of the Fond du Lac River, then into Lake Winnebago.

In addition to informing others, the stream monitoring process has been educational for volunteers.

"I find it interesting to figure out what's happening in the local streams from the standpoint of whether they are improving or have problems. It gives us an opportunity to see what can be changed to improve things so my grandchildren and children will be able to enjoy the streams as much as I have," Smet said.

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